



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Revelation 11:1-14

"The Two Witnesses"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are continuing our exposition of Revelation and turning to chapter 11 and verse 1 through verse 14 for the Scripture reading.

"And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months. And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth."

Now, if you make a quick computation, you'll see that the twelve hundred and sixty days are equivalent to the forty and two months. The 4th verse continues, "These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth." This illustrates, incidentally, the importance of knowing earlier Scripture in understanding this last of our New Testament writings, for "the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks" are explained by Zechariah chapter 4. One of the problems we have in understanding the book of Revelation is that we, even as believing Christians, find it a bit difficult to recall, to mind on the spur of the moment, Zechariah chapter 4. Probably, if I were to ask

you, "What's in Zechariah chapter 4?" there would be a few of you who wouldn't know exactly what was in Zechariah chapter 4.

Now, of course, it's alright to be in such a condition that you don't understand what's in Zechariah chapter 4. But, if you are in such a condition, and you don't understand what's in Zechariah chapter 4 then please, I'm speaking for John the Apostle, please don't say his book is difficult to understand. The problem is not the book of Revelation. The problem is the scriptural knowledge with which we come to this book. "Suffer the word of exhortation," as the author of the epistle of the Hebrews would put it.

"And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies shall be in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified."

We have said a number of times that the book of Revelations contains a number of symbols and figures of speech, and here is one which is interpreted for us. "The great city, Sodom and Egypt," is said to be Sodom and Egypt spiritually. That is, the city of Jerusalem has the characteristics of Sodom and Egypt, wickedness and extreme worldliness. So, the apostle gives us a clue as to how we should read this book, looking for symbols and figures. But when they are particularly explained for us, rejoicing in that, but remembering to that ordinarily, we take this book to be written in the normal sense of the language.

"And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth. And after three days and an half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven." (And the section concludes with) "The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together for a moment of prayer,

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we give thee thanks for the word of God. And we thank thee for this great Revelation, the unveiling of the greatness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And not simply as the one through whose sacrifice our sins have been paid for, but also as the coming great judge of the earth who shall ultimately rule and reign in this earth in triumph. We thank thee for his first coming. We look forward, Lord, to his second coming. And we pray thy blessing upon the ministry of the word of God today, not simply here, but where ever that word is proclaimed. May the ministry of the Holy Spirit attend it in conviction and faith. And in our preaching of the word, may thy hand be upon it. Bless the radio ministry and other forms of outreach of the chapel, and we praise thee, Lord, for all that thou hast accomplished in the glorification of thy name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today as we continue our exposition of this great Revelation is the two witnesses. We have, in going through this book to this point, no doubt, come to realize that what we have, in this great apocalypse, is a pictorial description of the last events of this particular age.

We have had an unusual vision in chapter 1 in which the apostle was given a vision of the risen Christ. We have read and pondered seven letters that the risen Christ wrote to the churches, evidently designed to be characteristic of the churches of the age, of the church, the present age.

And then we read and studied the vision of the throne in which the one sitting upon the throne possessed in his right hand the seven seal book, a testament or a disposition, a description of the way by which God the father would see that God the Son, the mediator, came to be the king of the earth in accordance with the divine purpose set forth in the prophecies of the Old Testament, the teaching of the Scripture. And then as those seals were opened, we are introduced to a series, three series, of divine judgments characteristic of the last days of the divine purpose. The result of which will be our Lord's rule as King of kings and Lord of lords. The visions have to do with divine judgment, primarily. And the seal judgments, there are seven of them. The trumpet judgments, there are seven of them. And the bowl judgments, to which we have not come, there are seven of them, as well. An advance history of how Christ becomes King. We came to the seals, and we saw that after the seals, when the seventh seal was opened, we introduced the seven trumpets.

Now, we have, in the progress of this book, we have heard six trumpets blown by the six angels, and again we have a bit of an interlude. The interlude is described for us in chapters 10 and 11 to verse 14 of chapter 11. And then we will have the blowing of the seventh trumpet, which the Lord willing, we'll look at next Sunday. In the interlude, we are given information about other matters that have to do with things that happen upon the earth, primarily. And this one introduces the heralds of the Second Advent.

We mentioned last week and I'd like to underline it again, that the first coming of our Lord was heralded by John the Baptist. He was the ambassador of the king. It was his task to be the forerunner. It was his task to warn Israel that he was coming, and that judgment also would come if there is no response to the ministry of the king that would come. Well, the same thing is true, in a different way, with reference to the Second Advent of our Lord. Evidently, from the information we have from chapter 11, there will be two witnesses, not simply one like John the Baptist, but two witnesses who will herald the soon coming advent of the king.

Now that's what is meant, it seems to me, when we read, "I will give power unto my two witnesses and they shall prophesy for three and a half years." So, we are looking at the chapters in which the great mass of details of holy Scripture find their culmination in the apocalypse.

I think I mentioned in my initial study of the book of Revelations, that one of my old teachers use to like to say, and you can tell what age he lived in by his statement, "The Book of Revelation is the grand central depot of prophecy." Back in the days when we had largely a railroad system all over this country, ultimately, you could get on the railroad in most of the places in the United States, and if you stayed on it, you would, ultimately, find your way into New York City, and the Grand Central Depot. In that we have an illustration of how Holy Scripture through many books of the Old Testament, the many prophesies of the Old Testament, find their culmination in this book.

And furthermore, as you know from reading this book, the very words of the book of Revelation are traceable in so many ways to passages in the Old Testament. Even though scholars have pointed out to us that there is no explicit citation of a passage in the Old Testament, that is one that is introduced with a statement such as, "Moses says," or "Isaiah says," nevertheless, the whole book is a mosaic of Old Testament Scripture. So, in chapter 11, we have again something very similar to it.

Now, there are three parts to it. The temple is measured. The ministry of the two witnesses is given, and there follows a great earthquake. And we'll look briefly at the measurement of the temple, and spend a little bit more time on the two witnesses and very little on the great earthquake, and conclude with an application.

John writes, "And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein." Perhaps we could say that what we have here is a picture of God's formal acknowledgement of the nation again, the nation Israel again, and also a promise of their protection from divine judgment.

Now if you are familiar with Zechariah again, what lies back of this is Zechariah chapter 2 and verse 1 through verse 5 where the prophet there writes something that probably, as I say, is related to what we have here. And I'm going to read these verses, chapter 2, verse 1 through verse 5 of the Book of Zechariah. The prophet there in the midst of his visions says,

"I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And, behold, the angel that talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him, And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man," (that's Zechariah) "speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein: For I, saith the LORD, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her."

So, John, given the reed, like a rod, is told by the angel to rise and measure the temple of God and the altar, probably the altar of incense, and them that worship therein. It's his way of being told that there is a part of the nation and its place of domicile that

will be preserved from the judgments that are to come. He then in addition in the 2nd verse says, "But the court which is without the temple leave out," that is do not measure it, "for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months."

Now we read in Scripture of the times of the Gentiles. They represent the times from the days of Nebuchadnezzar all the way through to the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ when Jerusalem is no longer what God intended it to be. The times of the Gentiles reach their climax here. The Lord Jesus made reference to them when he said, "Jerusalem shall be trodden under foot by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled." We are living in that period of time, and Jerusalem is being trodden under foot. It's not under the control of the nation Israel to this very day. I know you might think, "Well do they not have authority over it?" Well, yes authority over it but not over the most important part of it, the place of the temple. And there instead of a temple to the true God, we have a mosque to a false God. So, Jerusalem today is still trodden under foot.

Now, John goes on to say that, "This part is given to the Gentiles, and they shall tread under foot the Holy City for forty and two months." He refers to the future and half of the Great Tribulation period of time, or what we would call more accurately in biblical prophecy the seventieth week of Israel set forth for us in Daniel chapter 9, verse 24 through 27. That prophecy of the seventy weeks of years is extremely important, and the last seven years is the period of time of God's working in his mighty way, by which he restores Israel to the promises made to her and blesses the people of God.

Now, having said that, oh incidentally, there are problems of the interpretation here that we should not pass by without mentioning. If, for example, one does not have a futurist approach to this book, then these things become very difficult to understand. Not that all of our difficulties are understood by those who hold a futurist interpretation. I wish it were so, but it is not so. Dean Alford, who was the Dean of Canterbury, once

said, "No solution at all approaching a satisfactory one has ever yet been given of the forty and two months."

Now, Dean Alford is with the Lord, and he understands now, no doubt, but there are many people who have had difficulty with this expression. I've given you my interpretation, and the time will come when you will find out its either true or it's not. And you have my permission always to come and tell me, in heaven, that I was wrong on the interpretation of that particular passage. At that time, I won't particularly mind. Right now, however, I might mind a bit if you come and say, "You're dead wrong on the forty and two months."

What we need in studying the Bible is not intelligence alone. We need also intelligence, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and faith in the word of God, a willingness to accept the text as written. And then go to God with our difficulties and say, "Lord I don't understand this. Give me enlightenment." Enlightenment doesn't come immediately either, sometimes, but sometimes it's a long time, after many readings. And, from my own experience, sometimes it doesn't seem as if it's going to come at all while I'm in this body.

Now, having looked at the temple and its measurements, the apostle gives us the vision that concerns the two witnesses. And in verse 3 we read, "And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth."

Now, you might think in the light of what we have today that, "clothed in sackcloth" would be better rendered, "clothed in jeans," [laughter] because that's the common attire today, isn't it, to be clothed in jeans. But strictly speaking sackcloth is given here for a particular purpose. In the language of the Bible, to be clothed in sackcloth is to be clothed in the clothes of mourning. So, when individuals were mourning, they put on sackcloth.

And so, these individuals are individuals who prophesy in sackcloth. What's interesting about it, to me, is the fact that the kind of clothes they were fits the doctrine that they are giving. For their individuals who are prophesying of judgment, and therefore, consequently of a great deal of mourning. So, they are clothed in a way in which their message itself is underlined. They are not prophets who are clothed in the kinds of clothes you might buy at Brooks Brothers, but in sackcloth because their message is not a message of happiness and joy. It's rather a message of judgment.

Who are the two witnesses? Different things have been said about this. For example, some have looked at the expression and underlined the word two and have thought of the passages of Scripture found in the Old Testament, and in the New, that a testimony is not acceptable unless it is given by two or more witnesses. That's an Old Testament text cited in the New Testament. And so, it was well known that there should be, in order to have adequate testimony, two witnesses, a reasonable kind of thing, part of the Mosaic law. And so, it's not surprising then that some interpreters have looked at this and have said the two witnesses are not individuals, but rather they represent adequate testimony.

Others have suggested the two witnesses are the church because the church is a body of believers that does give witness and testimony to the truths of the word of God. Still others, perhaps being a bit more liberal in their interpretation, have said, "They are just two unknown men, their names are not given." And so, consequently we just have to regard them as two unknown men.

That's not necessarily a bad interpretation. But of course, we would like to have more specific information. We would like to know their names. Their names are not given here. And so, it's not surprising that Biblical interpreters looking over the word of God have sought to identify these individuals with individuals who have appeared in the past. One of the pairs of names that has been suggested is the name of Enoch and the name of Elijah. Now the reason for this should be obvious to you. Enoch is a person

who walked with God and then was not. God took him. He was raptured. He did not die. Elijah is an individual who was caught up to heaven with chariots of fire. He did not die. And does not the Bible tell us, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." These two individuals have not died. Therefore, their ministry is to carry out their ministry and to die. So, that we can say, "It is appointed unto all men once to die, but after this the judgment."

Now that's rather compelling, except that we remember that there is to be a rapture of the church, whenever it takes place, in which a whole generation of believers are going to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. And they are not going to die. So, Hebrews chapter 9 and verse 27, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment," is the expression of a general truth, and it is a general truth. But it may not necessarily apply to these.

The final interpretation is the one that I favor. And of course, you are welcome, as I say, in heaven to tell me I was wrong on it. In the mean time, I will live in the confident assurance that I am right [laughter]. I tend to think that this is Moses and Elijah, rather than Enoch and Elijah. And let me tell you, at least, why I do. I don't take this quite as seriously as I might sound to you. You know, of course, that Moses and Elijah were two that appeared with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter tells us, as well as the interpretation of those passages in the Gospels, that "our Lord there was transfigured as the Messianic King in his glory." In other words, they appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration with was the glorification of our Lord as King.

So, their ministry there, as they discussed together the deceased that he had accomplished at Jerusalem, was a ministry that had to do with the Second Advent and his First Advent. And it had to do with the kingdom. That seems fairly plain. Peter identifies it specifically in 2 Peter chapter 1 as the things that they were discussing. So, Moses may be part of the two witnesses for that reason.

Furthermore, you may also remember that in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy chapter 34, when reference is made to Moses' death, it is stated that Moses went up in Mount Nebo, I believe it was, and there he died, and he was buried. But then the Deuteronomist adds these interesting words, "No one knows where he is buried, even to this day." Isn't that a strange thing? Nevertheless, it's there. And throughout the whole of the writing of the Bible, I'm sure many people had discussions over where was Moses buried, specifically. I can imagine Jewish interpreters of the word of God pondering that question.

Then the epistle that Jude wrote contains these strange words, "Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee." So, Michael, the archangel, and the devil had a dispute concerning the body of Moses, Jude tells us.

Now, and this is my, I hope, godly speculation. My speculation is that the reason that Moses' burial place is not known, and further that the archangel and the devil disputed concerning the body of Moses is simply this, that there was to be a further use of Moses' body. And if that is a fair speculation, then what we have is a reference then to Moses. He does have a future ministry, not simply the ministry on the Mount of Transfiguration, but one that is beyond that. I should have said this, what is said about the two witnesses would fit Moses, too. For we also read that the witnesses have power over the water to turn them to blood. And that is, of course, suggestive of the miracles that Moses performed in the presence of Pharaoh in Egypt in the days past. In other words, putting it in your language, Moses had already had on the job training. So, Moses then is likely one of the two witnesses.

The other witness is Elijah. He appeared with our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, and specifically, in the Old Testament, it is stated that Elijah will appear again before the day of the Lord in Malachi chapter 4, verse 5, you needn't turn to it, I'll read it for you, but if you want to turn to it that's fine. The prophet Malachi states these

words, and notice it's near the end of our Old Testament, this is not the way in which the Hebrew Old Testament ends, but this is the last of the prophets, and in verse 5 of Malachi chapter 4 we read, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD."

When John the Baptist appeared in his ministry, and it was obvious he had a ministry somewhat like Elijah, the leaders in Jerusalem sent out priests and Levites to question him. And one of the questions that they ask him was, "Are you the Messiah?" And he denied that he was the Messiah, but they also ask him the question, "Are you Elijah?" And he said, "No." He was not Elijah. The Lord Jesus, later on, in his ministry, in Matthew chapter 11 and verse 14, in discussing the question of Elijah and the future, he says these words, and I'll read them for you, Matthew chapter 11 and verse 12,

"And from the days of John the Baptist", (Jesus says), "until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you will receive him," (the Authorized Version says "it", I think this for true sense should be him,) "if you will receive him, this is Elijah, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

At any rate, in chapter 17, verse 11, he says, specifically, Elijah will come. And so, we gather then that the two witnesses are the final reappearance of Moses and Elijah, and the fact that in verse 6 we read, "they have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy:" which reminds us of the ministry of Elijah before Ahab, in Ahab's day, and the fact that "they have power over waters to turn them to blood" indicates that these two individuals, who as I say, already had such on the job training are going to appear again and carry on a similar kind of ministry. Moses represents the law. Elijah represents prophecy, the first of the great prophets. So, that as on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah spoke of his death that he should accomplish at

Jerusalem, teaching us that the law and the prophets speak of the crucifixion of Christ.

So, here the law and the prophets, the representative of the law, the representative of the prophets, have a final ministry in which they will point to the advent and the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now we're told back in chapter 10 and verse 11 that John was to "prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings." And in verse 7, we had read, "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets." We understand, then, that these two individuals will appear, and they will prophesy. And their prophesy will be in accordance with promises of the Old Testament prophets, and it shall concern not simply his first work, in which he accomplished redemption by his sacrifice, burial and resurrection, but his Second Advent by which he brings in divine power and government, the kingdom of God upon the earth.

The two witnesses, now to sum up their work, verse 3 of chapter 11 says, "I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy," so they prophesy, and he goes on to say that they "are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth." Now, that's a figurative way, I'm going to pass this over because it would take a long time to explain all the details of it. This is a figurative way of saying they will carry out their ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, or as Zechariah 4 says, "it's not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit," that divine things are accomplished. They are like the two olive trees that stand before the God of all the earth.

They prophesy. I gather, from this, that we are to fill in there they prophesy about his decease at Jerusalem. They prophesy about his coming again. The two great points of our Lord's ministry, his first coming, his second coming, his first coming being his atoning work, his second coming being the completion of that atoning work in the distribution of its effects to the people of God. So, they prophesy, they have power over

men. "If any man will hurt them," the 5th verse states "fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies."

Now, you could imagine that if these men have power like some of those ancient monsters or dragons that uttered fire from their mouths that there would be a tendency to only try that once or twice [Laughter]. And one can see the effects of that in the great text because in the second condition, "if any man will hurt them," due to the kind of condition that is found here, we can say there is less likelihood that they will try. "If any man will hurt them," and they will try this, then "fire proceeds out of their mouth, and devours their enemies." But now we have a condition that expresses a little bit further question about whether they will try it. "And if any man should hurt them, he must in this manner be killed." Those days that are to come, my friends, are not days of cold war, but of very hot war, evidently

John Wesley once said, "I am immortal until my work is done." That the witnesses could have said of themselves. In the 7th verse, we read, "And when they shall have finished their testimony." They are able to accomplish their miracles as long as it is God's intention for them to do so. They are immortal until their testimony is completed. They have power over nature. We've referred to it in the 6th verse.

But now, there comes conflict. In the 7th verse the apostle writes, "And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit," I can imagine someone reading this for the first time and saying, "the beast, who's the beast? We've not had any reference to the beast up to this point in this book. Who's the beast?" And he's set forth as the beast, not a beast, but the beast. That's the advantage a reader of Scripture has because he knows something about the Book of Daniel, and he knows that in Daniel chapter 7, Daniel's prophecy of the times of the Gentiles is in the form of four great world governments, and they are called beasts, bears and leopards and he goats, and then a beast, a demonic beast, the last one, which Daniel cannot really describe. And so, when we read the beast that ascends out of the abyss, we are talking

about an individual whose further history will be given in the remainder of this book. But Daniel would give him a clue, and he would understand that this is a demonic powerful person who has worldwide governmental power. That will come out later. We don't have to deal with it now.

But, "The beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them and shall overcome them and kill them and their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt," we might have doubts about where this city is, some have suggested Rome, some have suggested some other places, but the fact that we read, "Where also our Lord was crucified," does seem to point us to Jerusalem.

"And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half," and the word "see" means shall just look at casually, take a look at. "And shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves," the kind of abysmal humiliation that people in the east can execute by leaving bodies out on the streets of their enemies. Great humiliation, that's what they did. So, the bodies came to be something they just glanced at and went about their business.

"And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them." The wicked rejoicing over the goodness of God as manifested in his saving work and also in the prophecies of the prophets that have been given. "And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them." Nothing is more horrible than the rejoicing of the evil over a manifestation of the goodness of God in the ministry of individuals. There's a dreadful light upon the faces of the foes of Christianity when Christianity suffers.

In fact, there was a poet who once wrote in, not his poetry, but in something he wrote, "The joy and the death of goodness is the most horrible joy in all the world, but no one can really say the last word over the dead body of conscious, goodness will not stay dead." We'll put it in our words. The goodness of God, the grace of God, the greatness of God, men may laugh at and may think they have overcome, but in the final analysis,

God will overcome their horrible happiness at the apparent defeat of the plans and purposes of God and accomplish his own victory.

In spite of what you might think, the people who rejoice over those that have suffered this ignominy, the two witnesses, are not, as someone suggested at the breakfast table today, the People of the American Way. [Laughter] At any rate, I see some of you don't understand the People of the American Way. But in the light of what I've said, maybe you will go and find out that it is an organization that is diametrically opposed to everything that is found in Scripture and the truths of it as well. But they are not referred to here, it's just people like that. At any rate, we'll go on. I see I'm over your heads, [laughter] but that's not the first time is it?

Now, here in the last part of the section, I just want to mention one or two other things. Incidentally, verse 10, "and they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another," has been called the devil's Christmas. And Donald Grey Barnhouse, many years ago in his exposition of the book of Revelation, wrote that he was in a gift shop looking for a card one day, and he picked up a Christmas card, and the Christmas card had as a text of Scripture this text upon it.

Can you imagine someone just going through the Bible and looking for a few phrases that say something about giving gifts to one another and then putting it on a Christmas card and sending it to your Christian friend? And the Christian friend reads the Bible and seeks to make sense of it, other than just regarding it as a collection of words, one following after another, looks at it and says, "why this has to do with the world rejoicing over the fact that God's servants have been slain and their bodies are humiliatedly left upon the streets of Jerusalem. What's he trying to tell me by this Christmas card that he has sent me?" [Laughter] Well we know, of course, that's the way the world understands the Bible. They have no concept of what Scripture says. What Paul said when he said, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit," their foolishness to him is surely true and fulfilled before our eyes day, after day, after day.

Well, now, in verse 11 and 12, "And after three days and an half the spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them." These men standing upon their feet were menacing in their terror that they produced by those who had made fun of them and mocked them, but "they stand upon their feet and great fear fell upon them which saw them." And as perhaps they wondered, "What in the world are we going to do now? We're lost and undone."

There came "a great voice out of heaven, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them." The great word used here is a different word from the one used to describe the way that they looked at them while their dead bodies were on the street. That word meant to just take a glance at, but this word means to look at and to ponder. In fact, it's a word from which we get the English word theorize. And so, they looked. And when they saw those two witnesses go up into heaven, the looks that they gave them were grounded in a much deeper perturbation than had been true of them when they just saw their bodies lying in the street.

So, John concludes by saying, "And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven." Now we can understand that in two ways, they gave glory by turning to the Lord. That is they were converted. That's a nice way to look at it. But we remember that in previous blowings of the trumpet, the characteristics of the men of the last days is that in spite of the divine judgment, in spite of these awful cataclysmic catastrophes that are poured out upon men, men do not repent. And so, I'm inclined to think that this is not the giving of glory to the God of heaven in repentance, but rather, the giving of glory to the God of heaven in fear of his greatness and power. That, I believe, is the sense of this passage. You will find that sense also in other places in the New Testament. Luke chapter 5 and verse 26 is one illustration.

Well, our time is up. There's no Cowboy game this afternoon folks. [Laughter]  
You don't have to run to see whether they're going to win today. So, let me sum up in a sentence or two. Surely, you can see that to fail to respond to the ministry of the word of God in heaven brings one into the greatest of perils. The peril of unbelief for unbelievers is astonishing and it is astonishingly near to us. Here are individuals who glorify the God of heaven, but they refuse the testimony of the Lord of the earth. As Fredrick Tatford said, many years ago, "They completely ignored the divine claims upon earth, the two witnesses, and vainly strove to avert any intervention from heaven." They did not want God to speak to them and to minister to them and to deliver them from their sins.

If you're here today and you've never believed in our Lord, the lessons are obvious. Today is a day in which we may turn to him. And if we recognize that the Lord Jesus is the Lamb of God who has purchased men and women out of every kindred tribe and tongue and nation. Our greatest urging, our greatest desire, the greatest thing that we could possibly wish for is to be one of them, those who are redeemed. So we invite you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus to come to Christ, to acknowledge your sin, to acknowledge that fact that you deserve judgment. Flee to him, and rest yourself upon the satisfaction that he has offered of the holiness and righteousness of God and the shedding of his blood. Come to Christ. May the Holy Spirit give you conviction of your sin, repentance and faith. Believe in Christ. Don't leave this auditorium without the assurance of everlasting life. Let's stand for the Benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed grateful to Thee for all of the gracious ministry of the word of God to us that Thou hast given us. That we should be allowed of thee to read these words of holy Scripture, given by the Holy Spirit through the apostles, is the greatest of graces to us, that by Thy grace we should come to rest ourselves upon Christ is the ultimate aim of heaven.

Father, by thy grace, touch the hearts of those who have heard this message, if they do not know our Lord, such that they turn to him. We thank Thee for Thy word. We thank Thee for our Lord of whom it speaks. We praise Thee for forgiveness of sins that is ours through him. Go with us now as we leave this auditorium.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.